

# Local group fights to open Kennedy files

## Hearings in Congress closely followed here

By Stephanie A. Reid

Democrat and Chronicle

Non-disclosure of sealed files on President John F. Kennedy's assassination nearly 30 years ago is a waste of taxpayer's money, says a local watchdog group.

That's why the Rochester Chapter of The Third Decade is closely watching U.S. House of Representative hearings, which began Tuesday and have continued through the week, on a proposed joint resolution to make public more than 700,000 pages of classified information.

The 12-member local branch was formed in February — amid renewed interest in the Kennedy assassination brought on by the movie *JFK* — to fight for release of the information.

State University College at Fredonia professor Jerry Rose founded The Third Decade in November 1984 as a clearinghouse for new information on the assassination.

The organization now is headed by Fredonia professor Gregory Quail, who says it has more than 300 members in 31 chapters in the U.S. and one in Belgium.

"A lot of us have been interested in the assassination for a lot of years, but we're not like most buffs," said John Giunta, media coordinator for the Rochester chapter.

"We're concerned citizens and taxpayers who do not want to see another investigation go by the wayside and waste our money."

Even with U.S. Reps. Frank J. Horton (R-Penfield) and Louise M. Slaughter (D-Perinton) supporting the resolution, members are "hopefully optimistic but cautiously skeptical" regarding the resolution's success.

Said Giunta: "We'd like to look at the glass as half full rather than half empty."

Quail said part of the group's skepticism has to do with whether the information will be censored, if and when it is declassified.

"Historically, we're in an age of Watergate and Iran-Contra," said Quail, whose interest in the Kennedy assassination dates

back to second grade.

"A lot of times when documents are released by the government, they come out chopped up with important information crossed out."

Slaughter, who along with Horton is one of the resolution's more than 40 sponsors, earlier this week had no doubt about the information's eventual review and release by a five-member board as the resolution calls for.

**THE INFORMATION** includes classified material from the CIA and FBI, the Warren Commission and two later Congressional investigations.

"It's terribly important for the people to know the truth where ever it leads," she said, adding that the material could clear up a number of inconsistencies.

Slaughter also supports making public files in the Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy assassination cases.

Horton argued in a statement at Tuesday's hearing that further delay in releasing the material would "simply bring to a boil the already simmering controversy."

**BUT HE ALSO** was fearful that by making the files public, lawmakers would fall prey to the current fad of re-examining the deaths of previous presidents.

Within the past year, authorities exhumed President John Tyler's body to investigate a theory that he died in 1862 as a result of poisoning.

And scientists plan to screen small amounts of Abraham Lincoln's DNA using blood from the clothes he wore when assassinated in 1865 to test a theory that he suffered from Marfan's Syndrome.

The syndrome, which is estimated to affect more than 40,000 people today, is a genetic disease of the body's connective tissue.

Add to that renewed interest in re-examining the Kennedy assassination brought on by director Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*.

"MR. CHAIRMAN, I support the opening and review of the old records as we approach the normal 30-year review anniversary and I sincerely hope that the full, satisfactory truth will be discovered and this matter finally put to rest," Horton said in the statement.

"And quite frankly, let the chips fall where they may. I fear, however, that some of those chips will undoubtedly land on predisposed shoulders, and we all know that anyone with a chip on his shoulder is never fully satisfied."

Despite the passage of nearly 30 years and several government investigations, many critics still dis-

pute evidence that points to Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone gunman.

Kennedy was shot to death Nov. 22, 1963, during a political trip to Dallas, making him the youngest president to die in office.

**OSWALD IS** believed to have shot the president from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

Numerous conspiracy theories exist — the latest coming from Stone, who argues in *JFK* that Kennedy's assassination was the result of a government conspiracy orchestrated mainly by the Pentagon and the CIA.

Local Third Decade members have started a nationwide grassroots campaign to have the files released as a way to restore taxpayer trust in the government.

More openness would encourage others with valuable information on the case to come forward, they say.

**"WE FEEL** there are literally hundreds of people out there who have eyewitness testimony, actual hard physical evidence who have been afraid to come forth for the last 29 years," said Giunta.

"Before *JFK*, if you discussed this topic you were immediately characterized as a buff or nut."

The Rochester group is the first chapter to form solely as a political action group to pressure lawmakers into gaining the information's release through a number of activities, including postcard and letter-writing campaigns.

It also hopes to persuade other chapters to follow its lead. Already, the group has produced a how-to video on starting a new chapter.

Branch organizations are in the works in Syracuse and at Cayuga College.

**SAID GIUNTA:** "Eighty percent of the public doesn't believe the government's version. Especially with the movies and all the things cropping up, there's a lot of interest in this subject."

## FOR MORE

For more information about the Third Decade, call 716-854-5989 or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Third Decade, P.O. Box 10579, Rochester, N.Y. 14610.



Louise Slaughter



Frank Horton